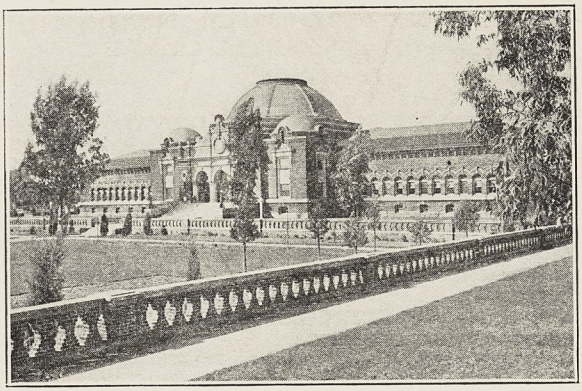

LOS ANGELES MUSEUM

of History, Science and Art

Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

AN EXHIBITION OF
JAPANESE BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS
OF THE 17th, 18th AND 19th
CENTURIES

September 6 to October 2, 1921, (inclusive)

JAPANESE BOOK ILLUSTRATIONS
of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries

Also

TWENTY-SEVEN ORIGINAL DRAWINGS

by Yosai

From the Collection of Mr. and Mrs. T. R. Fleming,
of Long Beach, California

FOREWORD

In Arthur W. Dow's standard book on "Composition," he states that his purpose is "to set forth a way of thinking about Art"— —"to direct the thoughts and awaken power and its control"— —"Art should be approached through composition and **not through imitative drawing**,"— —"Study of Composition,—of line, mass and color—leads to appreciation of all forms of art and the beauty of nature." To illustrate the principles of art he largely depends upon the very sources from which this exhibition has been drawn, viz., the old Japanese Illustrated Books, his work containing from this source nearly one hundred illustrations.

WOOD ENGRAVING

To China is credited the invention, in the sixth century of our era, of printing from engraved blocks. The world is therefore indebted to China for the art which has served to manifold the word and the picture for the multitude.

Next to invention in the order of merit is the contribution made by the Japanese to the development of the art of wood block printing by perfecting its technique—improving its productive power and the range of its expression.

There is very little comprehensively known in the western world of Japanese art, though it has had twelve hundred years' growth, two centuries more than had Greece, which ranks second in point of years. Art critics are, however, beginning to declare that a knowledge of Oriental Art is essential to modern culture, so vital and informing are its qualities, and during the past fifteen years more magazine articles have been published on the art of Japan, with one exception, than on the art of any other nation.

This exhibit is a mere handful of fallen leaves from a forest growth of two and a half centuries. But totally inadequate as it certainly is, the examples are all from the greatest book illustrators. Its inadequacy may be condoned by the fact that it is probably the first exhibit of its kind in the United States.

Notes on the Collection

The exhibit includes two book prints by Moronbu, hand colored, published about 1670, fifty years before a color block was used. He is called the Father of Japanese illustrators. To his influence Japanese wood engraving owes its first and enduring artistic impulse. 1646-1711.

Korin is represented by five designs. His influence on decorative art is universal. French writers rank him with the greatest of the world's decorators. 1661-1716.

There are seven Sukenobu's. He was famous for his pictures of the young lady of his period, in her indoor occupations and outdoor pastimes. 1674-1754.

Itcho, the master humorist of his time, whose bantering and caustic brush frequently disturbed the authorities, is represented by five specimens. 1652-1724.

There are twenty-three examples of Hokusai. He is incomparably the greatest of the whole line of illustrators. He contemplated the world like one entranced, as a blind man would if suddenly restored to sight. He was a three-eyed observer. He had the all-surveying eye of a falcon, viewing the panorama of the world, together with the eye of a ferret noting significance, in detail and action. Finally, he had the eye of that famous fairy who transformed the pumpkin into a royal chariot and six pairs of mice into prancing steeds with golden harness. John La Farge listed him with the seven greatest artists of the world. Even his critics, whose originality rests on quenching the flames of enthusiasm, concede him greater attributes than they give to their accepted favorites. Hokusai died after his ninetieth year. 1760-1849.

There are illustrations by Ippe, Kiyonaga, Harunobu, Shunsho, Buncho, Shigemasa, Suzuki, Chikude, Linsai and others, all dominant figures in the art of book illustration and in the history of wood engraving.

Yosai

This artist is represented by twenty-seven original drawings and eleven wood engravings. The drawings are from his series, "The Heroes and Celebrated Scholars of Japan."

Conse, the French critic, in his book "Japanese Art," says, "He had an encyclopedic mind and the finest intelligence of his time. His conceptions are always poetical, always unexpected. Animated with a serene philosophy, he was capable of a sustained flight in the fields of the ideal." "When he went to Tokio in 1875 the Emporer received him with great praise and bestowed upon him the title of 'First Painter of Japan.' "

These drawings verify the character of Yosai, as described by this eminent French critic. Yosai died aged ninety-one. 1878.

The Japanese artists hold the palm for length of days. It was thought a disgrace to get rich by art, proving that short rations is the secret of longevity.

What to Look for in the Exhibit

1. Observe the Notan—a Japanese word which has no English equivalent, meaning, "the harmony resulting from the combination of dark and light spaces whether colored or not, not mere light and shadow," to quote Professor Dow.
2. Fidelity to nature in the illustration of flowers and birds.
3. The marvelous rendering of flight in birds, of energy and action in the human figure, and in horses, tigers, etc.
4. The grace and stately repose of the human figure. The Japanese model by line rather than by shading.
5. The spiritual grandeur and romantic charm of mountain scenery, the quietude of snow landscapes, and of motion in nature.
6. The decorative invention and deliberate designing power, characteristic of the Japanese artists, are illustrated in every drawing. His felicity in spacing, his illustration of non-essentials are to be noted. Harmony with the Japanese is not an equal division of parts. It is, instead, a unity of irregulars. These qualities give the secret of the poise as well as the vitality of the simplest sketch.
7. Special attention is directed to numbers 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9. In the preface of the book from which these illustrations are taken, it is explained that they are reproductions of drawings dated 1650, which were discovered in the bottom of a chest, moth eaten but too good to perish, consequently the owner had them engraved in the year 1763. The vitality of these sketches, stamp them with the hall-mark of a genius of the highest order. They illustrate the conception which ruled the mind of the Japanese artist that the expression of life, energy and motion in a picture, depended upon the vitality, the dash, the instantaneous effect of the brush movement; and the fewer the brush strokes, the greater the realism. In these drawings a single stroke of the brush is sufficient for the trunk of a tree, with all necessary details; one daub a bird, etc. The art of the wood engraver in tracing faithfully every hair of the brush stroke is shown in these remarkable engravings.

Subject

The subject matter of Oriental Art, seems to possess an air of order or of authority, totally absent in the art of the West. It was divided into three classes: "mountains and water," "animals, birds and flowers," and "human figures." Symbolism reigned supreme, many artists using every subject esoterically—an inner meaning imparted to flowers, or the bamboo, to tigers or dragons, to breaking wave or mist enveloped mountain peaks. Art was employed to make familiar the classic poems, and historical and legendary events,—the various schools featuring one or the other.